

Strategic Research Monthly Review

September 1977

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	<p>Cuba has modernized its armed forces over the past decade, and especially since early 1976, with an assortment of Soviet ground, air, and naval weapons. Although these weapons are not the most sophisticated the USSR could provide, they appear adequate for Cuba's needs. Unlike some other recipients of Soviet military aid, Havana's forces can effectively use the equipment they get, having had ample opportunity to employ this gear in combat as well as in exercises.</p>

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The Cuban Military Modernization Program

The Cubans have been modernizing their armed forces over the past decade, and especially since early 1976, with an assortment of Soviet ground, air, and naval weapons. Although these weapons are not the most sophisticated the USSR could provide, they appear adequate for Cuba's needs and strengthen its combat capabilities.

Delivery of these new weapons apparently fulfills earlier Soviet commitments to replace with later models the equipment Cuba sent to Angola. The Cubans received T-62 tanks and modern air defense weapons for the old T-34 and T-55 tanks and antiaircraft artillery guns of Korean war vintage dispatched to Angola. The program also appears to be normal modernization of Havana's forces; some ships and armored vehicles are products of the early and mid-1950s.

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ZSU-23-4 antiaircraft guns in Havana parade

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Types of Weapons. Cuba's forces, while entirely dependent on the USSR for armaments, have not received the sophisticated weapons available to frontline Warsaw Pact units or some Arab states—MIG-23 Floggers, medium bombers, or Scud tactical missiles. The Soviets may wish to avoid antagonizing the US and other Western Hemisphere nations by delivering weapons which could be interpreted as a sharp, unwarranted buildup of Cuba's military power. They have not provided weapons whose capabilities exceed what they consider to be Havana's defense needs.

The cost of the weapons is not a factor for Havana, for the Soviets are believed to provide Cuba with military equipment at no charge. Thus Moscow can justify withholding some sophisticated weapon systems.



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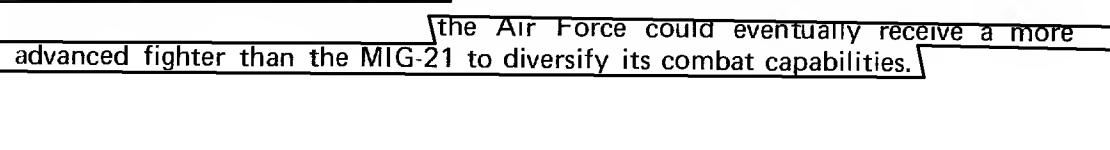
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Future Needs. The Cuban force improvement is closely tied to the national five-year plan and can be expected to continue to 1980 and probably beyond. The modernization program appears to be diversified, as all three services have been upgraded in approximate relation to their standing in Havana's military structure. The Army enjoys priority in acquisition of new equipment, followed by the Air Force and Navy.



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Cuban forces remain in need of a variety of late-model Soviet weapons to continue their modernization. For example, the Army could use a new armored personnel carrier such as the BMP to replace older models. Moreover, the ground forces still lack a vehicle-mounted SAM of the type sold to Eastern European forces—such as the SA-9 Gaskin.



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